



## Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women

Annual Report

May 2017

### **Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women ~ Members**

Chantel Bethea ~ Worcester  
Cathleen Liberty ~ Worcester  
Suzanne Lewandowski ~ North Brookfield  
Irene Rodriguez- Hernandez ~Gardner  
Amy Ebbeson ~ Rutland  
Judith Ockene ~ Harvard  
Randi Zanca ~Northbridge  
Sheila Simon-Aleman ~ Fitchburg  
Joann Stemmermann ~ Bolton

### **The following were nominated and elected as officers:**

*Chantel Bethea ~ Chair*  
*Amy Ebbeson ~ Vice Chair*  
*Cathleen Liberty ~ Secretary (note taker)*

### **Advisory Board Members**

Robin Currie ~ Worcester  
Courtney Ross Esobar ~ Worcester  
Talia Gallagher ~ Worcester  
Jacqueline McLean ~ Shrewsbury  
Fiona LaRosa-Waters ~ Cambridge

### *Purpose:*

The purpose of the Commission shall be to advance women toward full equity in all areas of life and to promote rights and opportunities for all women. The mission of the Worcester County Commission on that Status of Women is to act as a permanent centralizing force and effective voice in the County of Worcester to ensure the equal status of women of every race, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, ability, age and sexual orientation in educational, economic, political, health, legal, and social spheres including the provision of information, referrals, and guidance. The commission stands for fundamental freedoms, basic human rights, and the full enjoyment of life for all women throughout their lives.

### **Commissioners:**

Chantel Bethea (Chair), Amy Ebbeson (Vice Chair), Suzanne Lewandowski, Irene Hernandez, Joann Stemmermann, Judith Ockene, Randi Zanca, Sheila Simon-Aleman, Cathleen Liberty (Note Taker)

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### *Membership:*

We had one member step down due to work and commitment level of the commission. We have now filled that position with Joann Stemmermann of Bolton, MA. She comes with a background in Adolescent Development, Gender Identity and Agency, Curriculum Design, Strategic Gendering, Critical Pedagogy, Qualitative Research and Feminist Analysis.

### *Hearings/Public Forums:*

The Worcester County CSW and the Mass Commission on the Status of Women held a public hearing on "Women's Issues" in Leominster, Ma on January 24<sup>th</sup> at the Leominster Public Library. The theme: "Citizens, government officials and organizations that advocate for women and families in the region are invited to attend and encouraged to participate. Let us know about issues that are important to you, your children, your family and your community. "

The event was attended by about 50 people. Issues raised were access to transportation in rural areas, services for homeless women and families, the need for comprehensive sexuality education to decrease the amount of teen pregnancy in high schools. The need for more supports for women living in poverty was highlighted. A few citizens testified about the over-prescription of damaging psychoactive medications with little medical oversight and follow through.

### *Additional Activities:*

### **Worcester County CSW participated in the CHIP (community health improvement plan)**

#### **Vision:**

Greater Worcester is a great place to be born, grow up, learn, live, work, raise a family, grow and participate in community life.

#### **Mission:**

To promote the shared learning, reflection and broad engagement that improves community decision-making and quality of life for residents of Healthy Greater Worcester.

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To further its mission, Healthy Greater Worcester, CHNA 8 will work together to:  
Build and maintain the CHNA participation, ensuring that it is universally inclusive and representative of the diverse organizations, agencies, and CHNA 8 residents;  
Create opportunities for networking between people and organizations within the CHNA; Educate, raise awareness, and find solutions to health issues that affect quality of life; Provide guidance to CHNA towns in their efforts to assess gaps and assets;

Develop, implement, and evaluate initiatives, events, projects and policies that address areas of common interest to the CHNA 8 members; and

Mobilize the community to advocate for health in all policies and ensure implementation through effective program models and best practices.

The commission continues to use the CHIP as a touchstone and a basis for interagency collaboration.

### **Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women held their First Legislative Breakfast September 16<sup>th</sup> 2016**



The meeting included breakfast, networking, and a panel discussion among local elected officials and experts on policy issues impacting women's issues.

### **Worcester County CSW partnered with Emerge MA for a "WOW Women Organizing to Win Event December 5<sup>th</sup> at the YWCA.**

The panel made it clear that women have the power to make a difference in their communities.

Learn from the women who have, build the skills to tell your story, and grow your network to get involved!

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The workshop included a panel of powerful women leaders, training on skills you need to be civically active, and a discussion about opportunities that exist to change the world. It was attended by about 25 women from across the state, with participants coming from as far away as the Berkshires.

### **Worcester County CSW partnered with Worcester State University on a presentation on Human Trafficking on Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> 2017**

Robin Currie founded the Central Massachusetts Coalition to End Human Trafficking and also works with "Not for Sale," an agency addressing the problem nationally. She recently embarked on a 500-mile "Walk Free" trek of the streets and backyards of New England to raise awareness that human trafficking is a local problem. She spoke to a standing room only crowd of community members, representatives of nonprofits and WSU students, staff and faculty.

### **Worcester County CSW partnered with the Racial Justice Task Force of the YWCA for International Women's Day on March 7<sup>th</sup> 2017 with keynote Speaker Maura Healey Attorney General of Massachusetts.**

Keynote Address

Maura Healey, Massachusetts Attorney General

International Women's Day is a worldwide event celebrating the achievements of women while calling for greater equality.

We had an inspiring evening as we honored women's experiences, addressed challenging issues, and celebrated who we are. This year, Be Bold for Change! Advocate and take actions that truly drive change for women.

### **Worcester County CSW will be participating in the Fifth Annual Statewide Gathering with Investing in Girls May 12<sup>th</sup> 2017 in Sturbridge, MA.**

The Investing in Girls Alliance (IIGA) was created in 2007 at the behest of the Worcester Mayor's Task Force on Youth at Risk due to concerns about the rise of violence among girls and young women in greater Worcester. The Alliance is made up of representatives from local and state government agencies, public schools and colleges in the Greater Worcester area, non-profit and private organizations.

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The Investing in Girls Alliance (IIGA) is an unprecedented collaboration to address the challenges girls face in the crucial middle-school transition years. IIGA's mission is to improve services for middle school girls in central Massachusetts through research, education, advocacy, and collaboration. The ultimate vision of the Investing in Girls Alliance is that all girls grow up to be happy, healthy, and productive women. In order to achieve our mission we focus on three priority areas. Physical, Mental and Sexual Health are core to girls' well-being and good health provides the foundation for achievements throughout her lifetime. Education and Economic Empowerment gives girls the tools and opportunities they need to be in charge of their lives and actively engage in their families and communities. Addressing issues of Violence and Safety is fundamental to girls' success; we must ensure the safety of girls where they grow, learn, work and play. The work of IIGA centers around four key strategies; Data and Research to effectively measure the well being of local girls and understand their current and emerging needs, Public Education to raise community awareness of the unique needs, assets and challenges of middle school aged girls, Promoting Best Practices through networked training and peer sharing and Advocacy to secure gender equitable policies and sufficient resources for girls by aligning with like partners across the state including the MA Commission on the Status of Women and Girls.

### *Conclusion:*

This year's findings demonstrated that the women of Worcester County have a lot of work to do to achieve the potential and full equality of all women. The most pressing issue is the war on drugs for women. The lack of services, and beds for those trying to become better in their communities.

### *Priority Issues identified:*

- Mental health
- Health care navigation, available services, transportation to services, appeal process when service is denied
- Substance abuse
- Eating disorders
- Culturally Competent/ Appropriate Services
- Domestic violence
- Sexual abuse/ Rape

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- Economics for women- Jobs, Financial literacy
- Childcare , Child hunger – WIC
- Immigrant women
- Education (pre-k through college)
  - Stem pipeline
  - Head-start
  - Teen pregnancy
- Seniors
- Veterans

### *Goals for 2017 - 2018*

1. Collaborate with the Mass CSW and Regional Commissions to hold more public hearings in order to raise awareness of critical issues facing women in Massachusetts and to grow the participation and involvement of individual and organizational allies in the work of advancing equity for women of Massachusetts.
2. Maintain regular contact with our legislators and officials on issues that concern women that have been identified as our priority areas of focus.
3. Continue to collaborate with other organizations, and public officials, in order to support women and girls through public awareness.
4. Work closely with our sister commissions on implementing and developing best practices for the betterment of each commission.
5. Work on writing and proposing new state level legislative policies for women.
6. Attend community events and share literature about the commission to promote awareness of our role and work to increase involvement in our activities.

Submitted by: Chantel Bethea, Chair of the Worcester County CSW

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